

Blurring the lines between human and virtual: Consumers acceptance of virtual models

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Abstract

A new phenomenon of computer-generated virtual identities, also called virtual models, sporting distinct human-like features, find their way into brand communication. More and more brands utilize virtual instead of human models for their marketing campaigns for a variety of reasons, e.g. better control of the model's behavior, cost savings or zeitgeist motives (desire to be "up to date"). In two experimental studies we analyze, whether consumers are able to identify a virtual model as such and whether they find such models appealing. Our results show that virtual models trigger a feeling of uncanniness. In addition, consumers still prefer human models over virtual ones in advertising campaigns. However, virtual models can lead to higher perceived ad novelty. These results lead to the implication that marketers should carefully consider the use of virtual models in accordance with the aspired advertising goals and brand values.

Keywords: *virtual models; computer-generated imagery; uncanny valley effect*

Track: Advertising & Marketing Communications